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Archaeology, Anthropology and the Stuff of Time

Lucas' discussion of contemporaneity makes an important contribution to archaeological understandings of chronology and dating and to broader debates about temporality. Extending his earlier work on time (Buchli and Lucas 2001; Lucas 2001; Lucas 2005), Lucas' central insight is that contemporaneity is not a function of a shared unit of time but of the specific relations through which objects are imbricated. The approach is likely to have profound implications for archaeological approaches to chronology. Whether or not it undermines the current preoccupation with absolute dating, it should certainly give renewed impetus to those branches of archaeology that make it possible to examine time as a matter of the specific material properties of artefacts. This is important, firstly, because it opens-up the possibility of more nuanced empirical understanding of the very stuff of time (literally how it is materially manifest) and, secondly, because such empirical understandings enable conceptual refinement and extension of the categories through which time is understood. Of broader interest for non-archaeological readers, are the ramifications of this discussion of contemporaneity for the ways in which time is investigated and conceptualised. Writing as an anthropologist, interested but with no expertise in archaeological dating, it is these latter considerations that I want to pursue in my comments, as these relate to contemporaneity and to the broader investigation of time.

Lucas' move to situate contemporaneity as a relative property of the objects of investigation opens up the possibility of an archaeology that is *of* rather than simply *in* time. Rather than an external determining system (what Lucas terms the 'envelope concept'), time is a product of the relations between things and is therefore contingent and relative to the object(s) of investigation. In an influential paper in this journal, Ingold (2007) argues for a shift from materiality to materials, suggesting that a focus on material culture was accompanied by a generic concern with the material world, entailing a dualistic opposition to (immaterial) society, and foreclosing attention to the actual, specific and processual properties of materials. I read Lucas' paper as a parallel move, insofar as this urges a shift away from universal understandings of temporality as an abstract, determining principle (independent of people and place) to the actual, specific and multiple ways in which time is produced; time against temporality, to paraphrase Ingold, is materially and socially situated, emergent rather than pre-given as a universal organising principle.

This theoretical move resonates with recent anthropological discussions of time at a number of levels. While temporality has been a longstanding focus of anthropological interest, at least from the time of Evans-Pritchard, recent commentators have pointed to the ways in which anthropological models and methods internalise assumptions about time, to the detriment of empirical investigation of the actual relations and understandings through which time is constituted. Informed in part by post-human thinking this entails a move from the study of socially constructed representations of time, to an understanding of time as a distributed property of the relations between people and things as they interact in practice (Bear 2014; Ingold 2010). In terms that echo Lucas', this approach proposes that the situated investigation of these temporal practices conditions the analytic framework rather than vice-versa (Dalsgaard and Nielsen 2013). Theoretically speaking, new temporal understandings are continually extended and reconfigured through ethnographic encounters with temporal contexts that, in their specificity, call for conceptual refinement. New theories of time are produced through taking seriously the specificity of these ethnographic articulations. If time is always something different – differently specified in different situations – its

conceptual implications are always, recursively, a challenge to theoretical models derived from elsewhere. Rabinow's influential calls for an anthropology of the contemporary in some ways echo Lucas' approach in this paper, suggesting that we approach this not as an analytic or methodological given but as 'an assemblage of both old and new elements and their interactions and interfaces'; as 'a moving ratio of modernity, moving through the recent past and near future in a (non-linear) space' (2014: 142).).

These resonances might lead us to imagine disciplinary convergence, specifically in an approach to time that, in attending to articulations of people and things, collapses any straightforward conceptual separation between its social and material determinants. Indeed, attempts to elucidate the temporality of materials and the materiality of time represent an exciting arena of mutual interest if not as yet much collaborative research, across archaeology, anthropology and other disciplines (Ingold 2010). However if time is a relative property of practical interactions, indissolubly social and material, Lucas' account itself makes clear how disciplinary traditions of fieldwork and analysis (re)produce their own temporal frameworks, as much as they can be used to understand the temporal logics inherent in the practices of others. Insofar as what we know about time relates to how we know about it, time matters to archaeology and anthropology in literally different ways.

As Lucas highlights, chronology creates various issues for archaeologists: insofar as contemporaneity becomes a matter of temporal coincidence, attention to processually unfolding relations is foreshortened. Ethnographic methods also routinely engender and reproduce assumptions about contemporaneity but in rather different ways. Dalsgaard and Nielsen (2013) have recently highlighted how, notwithstanding the turn to multi-sited ethnography, anthropological definitions and demarcations of the field as a temporally bounded unit foreclose attention to the multiple temporalities at play as unfolding properties of interactions in the field. From the perspective of the 'ethnographic present', time is effectively collapsed into place, even as conceptions of place are distributed and extended to encompass non-localised processes. If time poses different kinds of problem for archaeologists and anthropologists, these disciplines also create different kinds of 'solutions', insofar as different interpretive and methodological practices create different interpretive artefacts.

I read Lucas' discussion of contemporaneity not only as a critique of the temporal assumptions embedded in prevailing archaeological approaches, but also as a more positive explication and amplification of existing archaeological disposition. His account makes clear a latent capacity of archaeological research to unfold time from the material properties of artefacts and the ways in which they are spatially related. The question of whether and how things are contemporary is thus a matter of empirical investigation. Lucas and others have elsewhere made evident through discussions of the 'contemporary past', how, regardless of the object of investigation, the archaeological method inheres in sustained empirical attention to the physical properties of things. Archaeological orientations to these questions are not just a matter of theoretical perspective but of the distinctively embodied 'skilled visions' (Grasseni 2007) – methodologies practically embodied as sensibilities, dispositions, ways of interacting, knowing and seeing. Archaeology, thus conceived, is less a practice of putting things in temporal context, than of making time out of things. In relation to the current discussion, this means that time is made visible *through* space, and hence materials are methodologically prior to time. Such a perspective helps locate the limits of the kinds of contextualising moves that anthropologists routinely engage in.

Lucas' reformulated vision of archaeological contemporaneity makes clear, by contrast, the materially and temporally reductive consequences of a commitment to the ethnographic present, and foregrounds a broader problem latent in a range of sociological perspectives: even where the temporal horizon is extended to embrace past and future, these emerge after the fact of the primary object of attention: methods and analytic concepts that privilege contemporary social relations and interests, locate past and present as various kinds of projection from this, whether conceived in terms of temporal 'imaginings', 'representations', or 'memories'. The past as a reflex of present interests leads both to an attenuated understanding of the historical process, and of the ways in which time is materially embodied (Jones and Yarrow 2013). In the context of anthropological discussions of heritage, Christoph Brumann suggests that conceptual frameworks that privilege contemporary social relations and interests render historic artefacts as 'empty signifiers' (in press), whose material properties participate obliquely if at all in the meanings that are (socially) made of them. Some time ago Marilyn Strathern (1990) highlighted how the anthropological move to put artefacts in social and historical context, forecloses consideration of the temporal contexts that artefacts themselves contain. Ingold (2010) has made a related point about the ways artefacts enfold time, as much as they are enfolded within it. Yet even if such conceptual insights have accompanied renewed anthropological attention to the material 'stuff' of which time is literally made, ethnographic approaches continue to situate this interest through fieldwork that routinely privileges the spoken words and practical interactions of people. My point is not to suggest that this is problematic per se, but that it locates the question of what time is and how we can understand it. Even if anthropologists are increasingly committed to conceptual frameworks that highlight how time is folded into things, it remains the case that our interests have rarely been accompanied by the kinds of expertise that would allow us to investigate these dynamics with anything like the sophistication of archaeological research. Lucas' discussion is a useful reminder to anthropologists of the interpretive limits that ethnographic investigation imposes, and of the ways in which these necessarily locate our understandings of time in general and of the contemporary in particular.

My comments so far have attempted to draw out the reflexive implications of Lucas' discussion of time in archaeology, for anthropological enquiry. In my final comments I want to suggest that anthropological approaches to time might in turn help to locate some conceptual limits of the approach Lucas espouses. For Lucas temporality is a product of 'things in relation to one another' and from this perspective contemporaneity is conceptualised as a matter of 'how temporality is bound to an object's identity and how it mediates its relation to other objects.' (12). This 'ANT view of consociality', may, as Lucas contends, have the benefit of enabling a more spatially and temporally distributed understanding of the person. One can certainly see how the approach makes sense in relation to archaeological methodologies that routinely route interpretive relations *through* things. Writing as an anthropologist and ethnographer, however the approach seems in some respects to narrow the interpretive possibilities for tracing relations, insofar as these becomes primarily if not exclusively a question of action, and 'things' become their primary locus. Paul Rabinow and Anthony Stavrianakis have recently suggested that in actor-network theory approaches, '... the range of affectation that is open to actants, human and otherwise, consists entirely and uniquely of one type of action, which ultimately is a kind of mechanics in its insistence that all phenomena can be explained by a micro- and macrophysics of action.' (71). Lucas' formulation of contemporaneity borrows explicitly from ANT approaches and seems to imply a similar 'physics of action'. From a more ethnographic perspective, one might then wonder about the

range of ways in which relations of contemporaneity can be defined and understood. While Lucas is right to highlight how the material properties of artefacts and assemblages themselves participate in these meanings, relationships of contemporaneity are also and indissolubly a product of how people think about, talk about and conceptualise these. Contemporaneity involves relationships between objects, and Lucas' account makes evident how archaeologists are uniquely placed to draw out the relational implications of their material properties. However contemporaneity can also be seen as a function of the various ways in which people narrate and conceptualise their relations with one another and with the non-human elements of the worlds they inhabit.

While Lucas is himself keen to open ways of tracing temporal relations, the invocation of ANT therefore seems in some ways to work against this aim. My broader point is not simply to highlight the diverse ways in which temporal relations – and hence contemporaneity – can be traced, but also to foreground the extent to which the specification of relations will always be relatively to the conceptual framework/s with which one starts. Here my comments rejoin and extend Lucas' paper in drawing attention to the situated nature of our own interpretive artefacts. An archaeologist examining contemporaneity as a matter of 'things in relation to one another' might produce a different sense of the contemporary, to an anthropologist whose ethnographic sensibilities make her more attuned to relations made through spoken words, or the everyday interactions of people. What we know about time is situated by how we know about it – by the kinds of sensibilities, visions and interpretive frameworks we employ as much as the theories and concepts. Anthropology and archaeology do not look at the same world differently – they make the world available to themselves in qualitatively different kinds of ways. From this perspective, time is not so much a shared object, as a shared set of interests. Each discipline constitutes a perspective on the other that helps to locate and define these limits. As such anthropology and archaeology's mutual interests – in time in general and the contemporary in particular -- lies as much in how these disciplines differ as in what they share.

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